

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 TRSE-00 COME-00 EB-07 LAB-04 SIL-01 /070 W
-----099112 271603Z /47

R 271419Z JUN 77
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5565
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
USMISSION NATO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 10591

USEEC ALSO FOR EMBASSY
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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: UK PINT EEC
SUBJECT: MICHAEL FOOT'S VIEWS

SUMMARY: MICHAEL FOOT FULLY EXPECTS THE LIBERALS TO
RENEW THEIR PACT WITH THE GOVERNMENT. HE BELIEVES
PARLIAMENT WILL ENACT DEVOLUTION LEGISLATION NEXT YEAR
AS WELL AS APPROVE DIRECT ELECTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN
"ASSEMBLY." THE ELECTIONS THEMSELVES, HOWEVER, ARE
UNLIKELY TO TAKE PLACE BEFORE 1980. HE IS CONFIDENT
THE GOVERNMENT WILL GAIN SOMETHING "USEFUL" IN THE WAY
OF AN AGREEMENT WITH THE TRADE UNIONS REGARDING WAGE
RESTRAINT BEYOND PHASE II. HE HAS HIGH REGARD FOR
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MRS. THATCHER AS CONSERVATIVE LEADER. HE DOES NOT
EXPECT A GENERAL ELECTION BEFORE OCTOBER 1978.
END SUMMARY.

1. THE AMBASSADOR, ACCOMPANIED BY THE POLITICAL
COUNSELOR, PAID A COURTESY CALL JUNE 24 ON MICHAEL FOOT,
LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL, LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF

COMMONS, AND DEPUTY LEADER OF THE LABOR PARTY. FOOT WAS UNUSUALLY GENIAL AND FORTHCOMING, AND VOLUNTEERED HIS VIEWS ON A NUMBER OF CURRENT ISSUES.

2. FOOT EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE THAT THE LIBERALS WOULD AGREE TO RENEW THEIR PACT WITH THE GOVERNMENT INTO THE NEXT SESSION OF PARLIAMENT STARTING IN NOVEMBER. THEY WOULD BE SUFFICIENTLY SATISFIED WITH WHAT THE GOVERNMENT PROPOSED TO DO IN THREE KEY AREAS: DIRECT ELECTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN "ASSEMBLY" (HE NEVER CALLS IT A PARLIAMENT), DEVOLUTION, AND PHASE III WAGE RESTRAINT.

3. IN ITS DIRECT ELECTIONS BILL THE GOVERNMENT WAS OFFERING TWO OPTIONS ON THE METHOD OF VOTING: A FORM OF REGIONAL LISTS AND PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION (WHICH WENT FAR TOWARDS SATISFYING THE LIBERALS), AND THE TRADITIONAL BRITISH FIRST-PAST-THE-POST METHOD. ALTHOUGH THE GOVERNMENT WOULD RECOMMEND THE FIRST OPTION, FOOT EXPECTED THE HOUSE OF COMMONS TO CHOOSE THE SECOND, BUT THAT, HE NOTED WITH A SATISFIED SMILE, WOULD NOT BE THE GOVERNMENT'S FAULT. IN ANY EVENT, A DECISION WOULD NOT BE REACHED BEFORE NOVEMBER, WHICH SUITED DAVID STEEL FINE BECAUSE HE WANTS TO BE ABLE, WHEN HE GOES BEFORE HIS PARTY CONFERENCE IN SEPTEMBER, TO SAY THE ISSUE IS STILL OPEN.

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4. WITH REFERENCE TO DEVOLUTION, FOOT SAID THE LIBERALS ARE PLEASED THERE WILL BE ANOTHER ATTEMPT TO GET LEGISLATION THROUGH. THEY DON'T AGREE AMONG THEMSELVES ABOUT THE DETAILS. LABOR'S OWN PEOPLE, HE THOUGHT, WOULD POSE MORE OF A PROBLEM THAN THE LIBERALS. HE WAS CONFIDENT, HOWEVER, THAT THIS TIME THE GOVERNMENT WOULD SUCCEED IN GETTING LEGISLATION ON THE BOOKS -- THAT IT HAD TO IF THE UNITED KINGDOM WERE TO REMAIN UNITED.

5. THE GREATEST DANGER TO THE GOVERNMENT, HE THOUGHT, WOULD COME FROM A FAILURE TO REACH A PHASE III ARRANGEMENT WITH THE TRADE UNIONS ON WAGE RESTRAINT. HE READILY CONCEDED THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT NOW GET GUIDELINES AS TIGHT AS IT HAD HOPED FOR BUT WOULD, HE WAS SURE, GET SOMETHING "USEFUL." LIBERAL IDEAS OF STATUTORY WAGE CONTROLS, HE ADDED, WOULD BE DISASTROUS.

6. IN AN EXCHANGE OF VIEWS FOOT AGREED THAT OCTOBER 1978 WAS THE MOST LIKELY DATE FOR THE NMT GENERAL ELECTION. THE PACT WITH THE LIBERALS WOULD HOLD UNTIL THEN AND AS LONG AS DEVOLUTION LEGISLATION REMAINED IN PLAY THE NATIONALISTS WOULD HAVE NO INCENTIVE TO BRING

DOWN THE GOVERNMENT.

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7. RETURNING TO THE SUBJECT OF DIRECT ELECTIONS, FOOT
REFUSED TO CONFIRM OR DENY PRESS REPORTS THAT HE WOULD
ABSTAIN WHEN THE GOVERNMENT'S BILL COMES UP FOR SECOND
READING NEXT MONTH. HE SAID IT DEPENDED ON WHAT OTHERS
DID AND WHAT SITUATION THE GOVERNMENT FOUND ITSELF IN.
HE MADE CLEAR, HOWEVER. HIS CONVICTION THAT ELECTIONS
TO A RIVAL LEGISLATIVE BODY WERE A MATTER OF PROFOUND
CONSTITUTIONAL IMPORTANCE, AND THAT THE HOUSE OF COMMONS
SHOULD BE ALLOWED A FREE VOTE. HE EXPECTED THE LEGIS-
LATION -- WITH A FIRST-PAST-THE-POST METHOD OF VOTING --
TO BE ENACTED NEXT SPRING, BUT WARNED THAT THE DRAWING
UP OF NEW CONSTITUENCY BOUNDARIES AND THE INEVITABLE
COURT APPEALS AGAINST THEM WOULD MAKE DIRECT ELECTIONS
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UNLIKELY BEFORE 1980. (THIS, INCIDENTALLY, IS A VIEW SHARED BY ANOTHER CABINET MEMBER, THE ARDENTLY PRO-EUROPEAN BILL RODGERS.) FOOT SAID CALLAGHAN WOULD GO BEFORE HIS EC COLLEAGUES AND EXPLAIN THAT HE HAD DONE HIS BEST TO GET THE ELECTIONS THROUGH IN TIME BUT THAT THIS WAS THE WILL OF PARLIAMENT. HE WAS SURE THEY WOULD UNDERSTAND. WITH A LAUGH, FOOT CANDIDLY ADDED THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD COUNTED ON THE FRENCH TO DRAG THEIR FEET AND PROVIDE SOME COVER, BUT NOW WOULD BE ALONE IN FAILING TO MEET THE 1978 DEADLINE.

8. IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION, FOOT DISAGREED STRONGLY WITH THE COMFORTABLE FEELING WIDESPREAD AMONG MANY LABOR PEOPLE THAT IN A GENERAL ELECTION, MRS. THATCHER WOULD BE AN ELECTORAL ASSET FOR THE GOVERNMENT. ON THE CONTRARY, HE THOUGHT MRS. THATCHER WAS A COURAGEOUS AND SKILLFUL CONSERVATIVE LEADER AND THAT AMONG THE ELECTORATE SHE WAS MORE POPULAR THAN TED HEATH HAD BEEN. HEATH, HE NOTED, HAD BEEN POLITICALLY LESS CONSERVATIVE THAN MRS. THATCHER (AND HENCE MORE AGREEABLE TO LABOR) BUT PERSONALLY VERY SOUR.

9. COMMENT: MICHAEL FOOT, THE DARLING OF THE LEFT AND A LONG-TIME BACKBENCHER WAS ONCE REGARDED AS CONGENITALLY INCAPABLE OF ACCEPTING PARTY/GOVERNMENT DISCIPLINE FOR ANY LENGTH OF TIME. HE HAS, HOWEVER, NOW SAT ON LABOR'S FRONT BENCH FOR MORE THAN FIVE YEARS AND IS A MAINSTAY OF THE CALLAGHAN GOVERNMENT. HE REMAINS ARDENTLY OPPOSED TO BRITISH MEMBERSHIP OF THE EC AND SUPPORTS THOSE WHO WANT TO BRING BRITAIN OUT, BUT AS THAT ISSUE, AGAINST ALL EXPECTATIONS, AGAIN BEGINS TO BUBBLE TO THE SURFACE, HE CAN BE COUNTED UPON (UNLIKE SOME LABOR HOTBLOODS) TO STOP SHORT OF ACTIONS THAT

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WOULD ENDANGER THE CONTINUATION IN OFFICE OF THIS GOVERNMENT.

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Message Attributes

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